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Hon. Michael Powell
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th St. S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Chairman Powell:

RE: Digital Television Transition (MB Docket 04-210)

Under your leadership, the Commission has done an outstanding job of advancing the DTV transition by urging all industries to do their part. That effort should continue, but it must include a focus on consumers, especially the poor who rely on over the air television. In particular, the Commission should not vote on a DTV plan until Congress fully funds a mechanism to ensure universal TV service for all Americans.

As recognized by the Ferree Plan and Senator McCain's S. 2845, vouchers funded from spectrum auctions should be provided to low-income consumers to equip their analog sets with down-conversion capability; and in this docket, MMTC has also advocated vouchers for DTV-ready sets. Yet to our surprise and dismay, on October 21 the White House announced its opposition to any voucher initiative.

Without a voucher plan, millions of consumers with analog sets could lose local service altogether. These families, many living paycheck to paycheck, as well as elderly and disabled persons surviving on social security, cannot suddenly yield up the cost of a converter box without foregoing a week of food. Thus, America faces the prospect of doing without universal television service for the first time since the 1950s.

A decline in television sets' ubiquity just from 99% to 92% of households would devastate our system of mass communications. Quite apart from its commercial importance, nothing holds Americans together like universal television service. Television is the most influential force driving our cultural values and norms, our language and dialects, and the information we carry into the voting booth.

The exclusion of the least fortunate Americans from the community of television viewers would even further deepen America's seemingly intractable social class divisions. It should matter to all of us whether low-income families receive accurate and timely information about jobs, health care, school closings and homeland security.

In light of the uncertainty regarding legislation to authorize DTV vouchers, it would be premature for the Commission to vote on any plan to reclaim the analog spectrum. Under no circumstances should the nation complete the DTV conversion process, or require broadcasters to relinquish their analog spectrum, without a well-conceived and fully funded voucher plan that will ensure low-income families' continued inclusion in our electronic commons.

Sincerely,

David Honig

David Honig
Executive Director